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REPORT ON PROGRESS AND FUTURE OPTIONS IN THE PROGRAMMING PROCESS

Report of the Administrator and of the Executive Director

I. INTRODUCTION

Harmonization of programming procedures

1. This report is submitted to the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board in response to Executive Board decision 2000/12 of 16 June 2000. Decision 2000/12 was discussed and adopted on the basis of a report submitted to the Executive Board by the Executive Director of UNFPA, entitled "UNFPA Country-Programming Approval Process" (DP/FPA/2000/11). In this report, UNFPA outlined its decentralized programming process, following the issuance of new programme guidelines in 1997. The new guidelines were introduced as part of an initiative to review and revise all of UNFPA's policies, procedures and guidelines in order to reflect the programmatic changes resulting from the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and to develop basic tools for an effective decentralization of programming responsibilities to the field.

2. Executive Board decision 2000/12 emphasized:

(a) "the need for further harmonization and standardization of programmes and programming procedures for all United Nations funds and programmes within the United Nations Development Group" (para. 3);

(b) "the need for such harmonization efforts to provide the basis for a substantive, timely and joint oversight function of the respective Executive Boards" (para. 4).

3. In view of the above, the Executive Board requested UNFPA:

(a) "to propose to the other members of the United Nations Development Group the establishment of a working group with the objective of developing a common programme approval process ..." (para. 5);

(b) "to report to the Executive Board at the annual session of 2001 on progress and future options in the programming process" (para. 6).

4. Subsequently, in its meeting of 7 November 2000, the Executive Committee of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), as a follow-up to the meetings of the Regional Bureaus/Programme Structures, proposed that this working group "take concrete steps to make the Common Country Assessment (CCA)/United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) an integral part of their respective programming procedures". Furthermore, it was felt by the UNDG Executive Committee that the working group outcome would provide useful inputs for the comprehensive triennial policy review to be undertaken in the year 2001.

UNDG ad hoc working group

5. Following decision 2000/12, UNFPA convened and chaired a UNDG ad hoc working group on the harmonization of the programme approval process. The ad hoc working group was composed of the members of the UNDG Executive Committee – UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and WFP. The ad hoc working group reviewed and discussed various options for more substantive involvement in and contribution of members of the respective Executive Boards to the programme development process, as well as options for further streamlining and integrating the programme development process of the four UNDG partner agencies.

6. On the basis of numerous discussions, both within the ad hoc working group and within the respective agencies concerned, this report presents two options for further streamlining the programme approval process of the UNDG partners, as well as greater substantive and timely involvement of members of the respective Executive Boards. The report thus responds to

Member States' repeated and long-standing call to reduce the burden placed on Governments through cumbersome and uncoordinated programming processes, as reflected, inter alia, in General Assembly resolutions 37/226, 41/171, 42/196, 44/211, 47/199, 50/120 and 53/192.[1] It also builds on progress achieved over the past three years in terms of synchronization of programme cycles of the UNDG partner agencies,[2] which, in turn, facilitates programmatic coherence and complementarity.

7. Extensive consultation took place with the UNDG Executive Committee agencies on the proposed options for the harmonization of the programme approval process. A draft version of the report was submitted to the UNDG Executive Committee's Support Group for further review, comments and suggestions. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated in a revised draft, and a new draft report was submitted to the Executive Committee of the UNDG for further review and endorsement. In their meeting of 6 March 2001, the Executive Heads of the four UNDG organizations reviewed the options presented in the report. They fully endorsed the content of the report and encouraged UNFPA to proceed with its submission to the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board. Hence, this report reflects the common understanding and vision of the four UNDG organizations with regard to the harmonization of the programme approval process. It should be noted that during the meeting of the UNDG Executive Committee of 6 March 2001, the Executive Heads of UNDP and UNFPA expressed a strong preference for one of the options presented in the report. This has been reflected in paragraph 21 below.

II. PRINCIPLES IN PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

Key principles

8. Several key principles guided the elaboration of future options for the programme approval process. The members of the working group felt there was a need to:

(a) simplify the current processes in order to reduce the burden imposed on programme countries and United Nations country teams;

(b) encourage synergies between the programmes of UNDG partner agencies;

(c) promote decentralization;

(d) ensure the accountability of the Executive Boards through early inputs;

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[1] See also the report of the Secretary-General to ECOSOC (E/2000/46, 23 May 2000), part III-A, for a comprehensive history of General Assembly and ECOSOC resolutions on this matter.

[2] It is projected that 98 per cent of all countries, where applicable, have plans to harmonize their programme cycles by 2004.

(e) maintain a degree of visibility for individual organizations;

(f) ensure the centrality of the CCA and UNDAF in programme development.

9. In line with the decentralization of programme authority to the field level, emphasis was put on the country-led and country-driven nature of the programme development process, with Governments of programme countries and the Representatives of the four UNDG organizations firmly in control of the process.

Centrality of the CCA and UNDAF in programme development

10. The two options presented below start from the premise that the CCA should be the centerpiece of the UNDG's analytical efforts at the country level. Also, the UNDAF, which is meant to be the common planning framework for United Nations operational activities at the country level, should become the starting point of the collaborative programme development and planning process and should form the ultimate basis for the individual country programmes of United Nations agencies.

11. In view of the above, it is proposed that:

(a) The CCA will become the apex of UNDG partners' assessment exercises, with the understanding that any individual situation analysis undertaken by UNDG partner agencies complement this collective analysis, if necessary;

(b) The UNDAF will become the United Nations "business plan" without which individual country programmes cannot be formulated or discussed and approved by the respective Executive Boards.

12. Therefore, the CCA and UNDAF processes are fully integrated into the programme development and approval process. This also means that the delivery of the UNDAF prior to the development of new country programmes will be mandatory, as currently foreseen in the UNDAF guidelines.

III. OPTIONS FOR HARMONIZED PROGRAMME APPROVAL

13. Option 1.

Step 1: The starting point for this option is a jointly undertaken and finalized CCA.

Step 2: Once the CCA has been finalized, the United Nations country team, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator and in close cooperation and collaboration with the host Government and other key partners, and in accordance with the existing guidelines, will start the process of drafting the UNDAF.[3] Subsequently, the UNDAF will be finalized and approved by the host Government and the United Nations country team. The UNDAF, duly signed by the Government and the United Nations participating organizations, should be submitted to UNDG office and the respective regional or headquarters offices of the respective organizations by the end of January of the last year of the programme cycle.

Step 3: Following the approval of the UNDAF by the host Government and the United Nations country team, the UNDG partner agencies will organize individual and/or joint strategy meetings at the country level, under the auspices of their respective Representatives, and in close cooperation and collaboration with government counterparts, to draft their respective organizations' country programme outlines,[4] with clear linkages to the UNDAF. These draft country programme outlines will highlight the main components of the proposed country programmes, such as priorities, strategies, outcomes and proposed budget, with a recommended maximum of six pages.

Step 4: The draft country programme outlines will be presented to the annual session of the respective Executive Boards for substantive discussions. It will be mandatory to attach the UNDAF, as an information paper, to these documents. On the basis of the substantive discussions on the proposed country programmes, the Boards will approve the proposed resource allocation and authorize the respective Executive Directors (and Administrator) to finalize the country programmes, taking into account comments made by the Board.

Step 5: Following the discussions in the Executive Boards, the organizations will finalize the country programmes. By October of the last year of the country programme, the organizations are required to post their finalized new country programme documents on their respective websites. If necessary, Members of the Board would then have the option to request a discussion or ask questions at the next session of the Board.

14. See annex 1 for the timeframe of the proposed option.

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[3] Participation of members of the Executive Boards in the formulation and finalization of the CCA and UNDAF and country programmes is optional, provided that the principle of a country-led exercise is not being compromised. Such involvement (which already takes place to a limited extent) can be realized by means of: (a) participation by members of the Executive Boards through their diplomatic representations in the programme country in in-country strategy meetings; (b) Executive Board members' physical participation in the in-country strategy meetings; and/or (c) by participating via available information technology, such as tele- or video-conferencing, to provide input into the discussions.

[4] Along the lines of the current country programmes of UNFPA, country programme recommendations of UNICEF, country cooperation frameworks of UNDP and country programmes of WFP.

15. Option 2.

Steps 1 & 2: The same as in option 1.

Step 3: Following the approval of the UNDAF by the host Government and the United Nations country team, the UNDG partner agencies will organize individual and/or joint strategy meetings at the country level to draft their respective agency's specific strategy notes,[5] with clear linkages to the UNDAF. These strategy notes outline the main priority problems, strategies, main objectives and programme thrusts, along with proposed financial allocations of the individual agency's proposed new country programmes, with a recommended maximum of six pages.

Step 4: The strategy notes, with the UNDAF attached as a mandatory information paper, will be submitted to the annual sessions of the individual Executive Boards in June for review.

Step 5:

Alternative A: On the basis of the discussions in the respective Executive Boards, the UNDG partner agencies will further develop their country programmes. The final versions, taking into account the discussions in the Executive Boards, will be submitted to the January sessions (first year of new programme) of the respective Executive Boards for final approval on a no-objection basis.[6]

Alternative B: On the basis of the discussions in the respective Executive Boards, the UNDG partner agencies will further develop their country programmes. In January of the first year of the programme cycle, Regional Directors (or other suitable secretariat staff) will present a brief omnibus report to their Executive Boards on how the respective programmes agreed between individual agencies and the Government reflect Board comments. The omnibus report would also contain financial allocations and an intended results matrix for each country programme for final approval by the Board on a no-objection basis.

16. See annex 2 for the timeline of this option.

Duration

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[5] Along the lines of the current country programme outline of UNFPA, country note of UNICEF, and country strategy outline of WFP. It should be noted that in the case of UNDP, the CCA and UNDAF constitute the programme development steps prior to the country cooperation framework (CCF).

[6] This document could be accompanied by a statement by the respective Head of Agency or Regional Director informing the Executive Board members that the final version takes fully into account the comments, suggestions and concerns of the Executive Board, as expressed during the annual session.

17. Option 1. The entire programme development process, starting with situation assessment and analysis to the final posting of the individual country programmes on the agencies' respective websites, will take approximately 17 months, including 11 months of work at the country level by UNDG partner agencies and the host Government, starting in the fourth year of the harmonized programme cycles.

18. Option 2. The entire programme development process, starting with situation assessment and analysis to the final approval of the new country programmes by the respective Executive Boards will take approximately 20 months, including 12 months of work at the country level by UNDG partner agencies and the host Government, starting in the fourth year of the harmonized programme cycles.

Related issues

19. In reviewing the two different options, a number of issues have to be taken into consideration. First, in those countries where the United Nations agencies' programme cycles are not yet harmonized, because of limited United Nations presence and/or an unstable country situation, the options presented above for further harmonization of the programme approval process might, for the time being, be difficult to implement. However, it is suggested that, to the extent possible, United Nations country teams in those countries aim to apply the proposed simplified programme development and approval processes.

20. It is important to note that option two, which requires agencies to submit documentation to their respective Executive Boards twice over the course of the programme development process, means an increased workload for two of the four UNDG partner agencies – UNDP and UNFPA. This runs counter to key principle 1, listed in paragraph 8 above, which expressed the need to simplify the current programme development and approval processes in order to reduce the burden imposed on programme countries and United Nations country teams, although it does correspond to the UNICEF and WFP Boards' expressed desire to have a two-stage consultative-approval process.

Preferred option

21. In view of the principles established in paragraph 8, in particular the often expressed need to simplify the current processes in order to reduce the burden imposed on programme countries and United Nations country teams, and taking into consideration the issues mentioned in paragraphs 19 and 20, UNDP and UNFPA have a strong preference for option 1, as presented above. This option would require UNDP and UNFPA to submit draft country programme outlines to the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Boards for substantive discussions prior to the

finalization of the programme documents. The Board would approve the programme and the proposed resource allocation and would authorize the Administrator of UNDP and the Executive

Director of UNFPA to finalize the country programmes, taking into account the comments made by the Board.

22. In order to further reduce the workload on UNDP and UNFPA staff, it is proposed that the Executive Board authorize the Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Director of UNFPA to approve any country programme that is less than $3 million, with the provision that the CCA and UNDAF processes are properly followed.

23. In addition, it is further proposed that the minimum lead time for submission of Executive Board documents be reduced from 10 to 6 weeks, along the lines currently followed by the Executive Boards of UNICEF and WFP. This is deemed desirable in order to reduce the time devoted by UNDP and UNFPA staff to programme development and approval.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

24. In the spirit of decentralized programme development exercises, it is important to reiterate that the entire process of programme development should be country-driven. Substantive inputs and contributions from external sources, including from members of the Executive Boards, should therefore preferably be expressed during strategic meetings at the country level. Hence, mechanisms should be put in place for substantive and timely involvement of Executive Board members for those stages in the programme development process that take place at the country level. Appropriate and frequent use should be made of existing and fast developing information technologies (e.g., tele- and video-conferencing, e-mail, Internet) to facilitate the involvement of Executive Board members. More frequent and intense use of available information technology in the interaction between members of the Executive Boards and the UNDG partner agencies at the country level would to a great extent facilitate the deliberations and decision-making processes in the Executive Board and would enable the members of the Executive Boards to review and approve new country programmes in one rather than two or more formal sessions of the Executive Board, as is proposed in option 1 above.

25. The two options presented have taken into account the key principles established from the outset and highlighted in paragraph 8 of this report. In addition, the two options also incorporate both the wishes of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board to further streamline the programme procedures of the four UNDG partner agencies and to have opportunities to provide substantive inputs in the programme development process.

V. RECOMMENDATION

26. The Board may wish to:

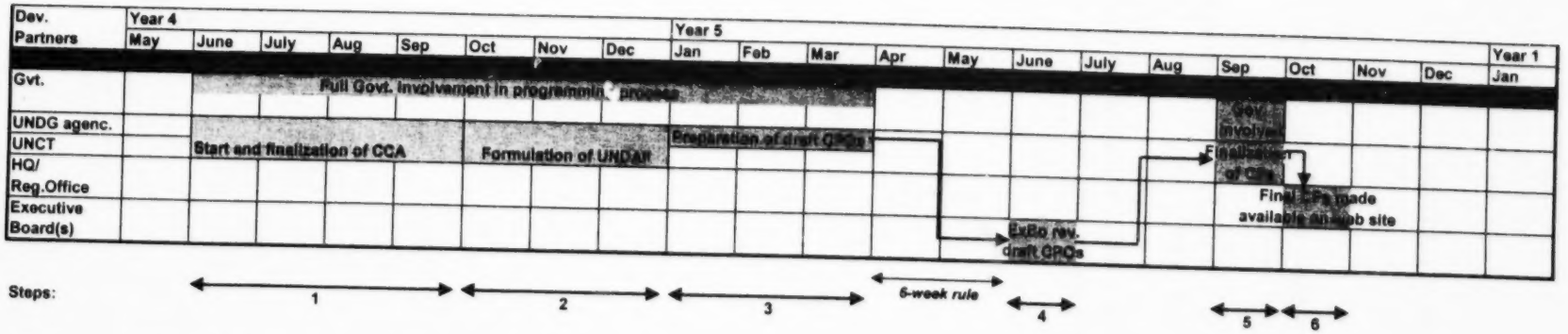
(a) Take note of the report on progress and future options in the programming process as contained in document DP/2001/12 and DP/FPA/2001/7;

(b) Endorse either Option 1 or Option 2 as the future programming process for UNDP and UNFPA, to take effect from the annual session 2002;

(c) Request the Administrator and the Executive Director to report back to Executive Board at its annual session 2004 on the experience of implementing the programming process during its first two years of operation.

Annex 1: Timeline for Option 1

Option 1: 17 months, including 11 months of work at country level by UNDG partners and host Government



Step 1: Jointly undertaken and finalized CCA

Step 2: Drafting of the UNDAF. The UNDAF is finalized and agreed upon at the country level, for mandatory delivery to Headquarters in January of Year 4

Step 3: The UNDG partner agencies prepare their draft country programme outlines and deliver them at the beginning of April for submission to the Executive Boards, with the UNDAF attached as an information document

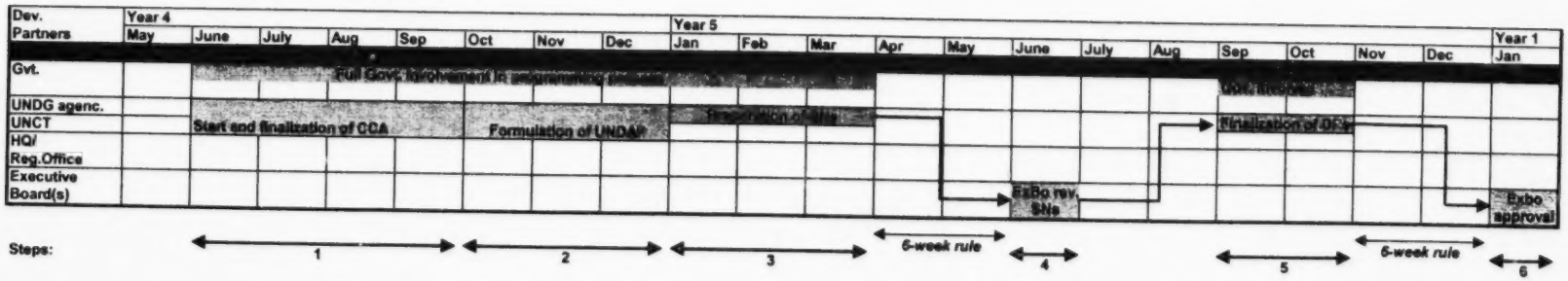
Step 4: The Executive Boards review and comment on the draft CPOs, approve the proposed resource allocations and authorize the Executive Director / Administrator to proceed with the finalisation of the country programmes on the basis of comments made

Step 5: Taking account of the discussions in the respective Executive Boards, the UNDG partner agencies finalise their country programmes

Step 6: The final versions of CPs are made available by the respective agencies on their web sites

Annex 2: Timeline for Option 2

Option 2: 20 months, including 12 months of work at country level by UNDG partners and host Government



Step 1: Jointly undertaken and finalized CCA

Step 2: Drafting of the UNDAF. The UNDAF is finalized and agreed upon at the country level, for mandatory delivery to Headquarters in January of Year 4

Step 3: The UNDG partner agencies prepare their Strategy Notes and submit them at the beginning of April to the Executive Boards, with the UNDAF attached as information document

Step 4: The Executive Boards review and comment on the Strategy Notes

Step 5: On the basis of the discussions in the respective Executive Boards, the UNDG partner agencies further develop their country programmes

Step 6: The final versions of CPs are submitted to the January sessions (first year of programme cycle) of the respective Executive Boards for final approval on no-objection basis

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